



Disaster and Emergency Management Resources

Introduction to Extreme Heat

Extreme Heat Facts

- More people in this country die from extreme heat than from hurricanes, lightning, tornadoes, floods, and earthquakes combined.
- Heat kills by pushing the human body beyond its limits. Under normal conditions, the body's internal thermostat produces perspiration that evaporates and cools the body. However, in extreme heat and high humidity, evaporation is slowed and the body must work extra hard to maintain a normal temperature.
- Doing too much on a hot day, spending too much time in the sun, or staying too long in an overheated place can cause heat-related illnesses. Know the symptoms of heat disorders and overexposure to the sun and be ready to give first aid treatment.
- People living in urban areas may be at greater risk from the effects of a prolonged heat wave than people living in rural regions. An increased health problem, especially for those with respiratory difficulties, can occur when stagnant atmospheric conditions trap pollutants in urban areas, thus adding unhealthy air to excessively hot temperatures.

Extreme Heat Terms

- **Heat wave:** A prolonged period of excessive heat, often combined with excessive humidity. The National Weather Service steps up its procedures to alert the public during these periods when it anticipates an increase in human heat-related illnesses.
- **Heat index:** A number in degrees Fahrenheit that tells how hot it really feels when relative humidity is added to the actual air temperature. Exposure to full sunshine can increase the heat index by 15 degrees.

Adapted from resource material developed by the National Center for Environmental Health, CDC